

**Notice of Proposed Action  
Opportunity to Provide Scoping Comments**

**Granite Basin OHV Trail Development Project**

**USDA Forest Service  
Plumas National Forest, Feather River Ranger District  
Plumas County, California**



**Granite Basin, Proposed OHV Area, Photo Credit: Butte County RCD, July 2018**

**May 2019**

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## Where is this project in the NEPA process?

NEPA (short for the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969) guides the Forest Service decision making process and provides opportunities for interested parties to give their ideas about resource management. Input during the scoping period (step 3 in the checklist below) is important in helping the Forest Service identify resource needs which will shape the alternatives that are evaluated and lead to the formation of a decision. The Granite Basin OHV Development Project falls under the provisions of the Plumas National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (USDA 1988) as amended by the Sierra Nevada Forest Plan Amendment FSEIS and ROD (USDA 2004a, 2004b). Public notice, comment, and administrative review for this project are governed by 36 CFR 218 Subparts A and B, regulations that provide for a pre-decisional objection process for projects documented in a Record of Decision or Decision Notice. The checklist below shows the steps of the NEPA process for this proposed project. The checked line indicates where the attached proposed action is in that process. Checklist items with bold outline are public involvement opportunities offered during the planning process.

\_\_\_ Step One - Need for a Project

\_\_\_ Step Two - Develop Project Proposal

**X Step Three - Scoping (public input, 30 days)**

\_\_\_ Step Four - Develop Issues and Alternatives

\_\_\_ Step Five – Environmental Effects Analysis

\_\_\_ **Step Six – Draft EA for Comment (public input, 30 days)**

\_\_\_ Step Seven – Response to Comments

\_\_\_ **Step Eight - Final EA and Draft Decision Notice (objection filing period, 45 days)**

\_\_\_ **Step Nine - Objection Resolution (45 days)**

\_\_\_ Step Ten – Decision Notice

### **Project Area:**

The project is located within the Granite Basin on National Forest System (NFS) lands on the Plumas National Forest, Feather River Ranger District. It is approximately 25 miles northeast of Oroville, CA and 20 miles west of Quincy, CA.

Granite Basin is located on the southern slope of a broad and prominent northeast-southwest trending ridge that lies between the North Fork and Middle Forks of the Feather River. The Granite Basin Landscape is the Little North Fork of the Middle Fork Feather River and is drained by Marble, Buckhorn, Frazier, Axford, Coquette, Coldwater, and Mountain House Creeks as well as Bear Gulch. The landscape contains several major ridges, including Toland, Rock Island, Sky High, and Glazier.

The project area is within portions of Township (T) 23 North (N), Range (R) 6 East (E), Sections 11-15, 21-22, 24-28, 34-36; T23N, R7E Sections 10-11, 15, 18-20, 22, 27-33; T22N, R7E section 5 of the Mount Diablo Base Meridian (See Figure 1).

The project area ranges from 4,800 to 5,840 feet in elevation (See Figure 2). The project area is ~2 miles southwest of the Bucks Lake Recreation Area. The terrain in the project area is moderately sloped, with steeper slopes in the creek canyons. The landscape is composed of granitic and metamorphic rock formed during the Mesozoic age.

### **Purpose and Need:**

Butte County Public Works and the PNF have partnered to evaluate the Granite Basin trail system for development of better trail connectivity and additional riding opportunities for the Granite Basin recreation area.

The Granite Basin area is a popular destination for Off-Highway Vehicles (OHV) use in the Plumas National Forest (PNF). It includes a wide variety of OHV roads and trails for 4x4 vehicles greater than 50-inches width, less than 50-inches width, and motorcycles. OHV recreation is a major element of the PNF recreation program and contributes to the economic sustainability of Butte, Plumas, Sierra, Yuba, and Lassen Counties. The PNF is a short drive from Reno, NV, Yuba City, Marysville, Chico, and Susanville, CA. It is a one-hour drive to the forest from Sacramento and about 2 ½ hours from the San Francisco Bay area.

The California Department of Parks and Recreation, Grants and Cooperative Agreements Program (Grants Program) provides for well managed off-highway vehicle recreation in the State of California by providing financial assistance to cities, counties, districts, federal agencies, state agencies, educational institutions, federally recognized Native American Tribes, and nonprofit entities. The Grants Program supports the planning, acquisition, development, maintenance, administration, operation, enforcement, restoration, and conservation of trails, trailheads, areas, and other facilities associated with the use of off-highway motor vehicles, and programs involving off-highway motor vehicle safety or education. Butte County Public Works received a multi-year OHMVR grant for this project.



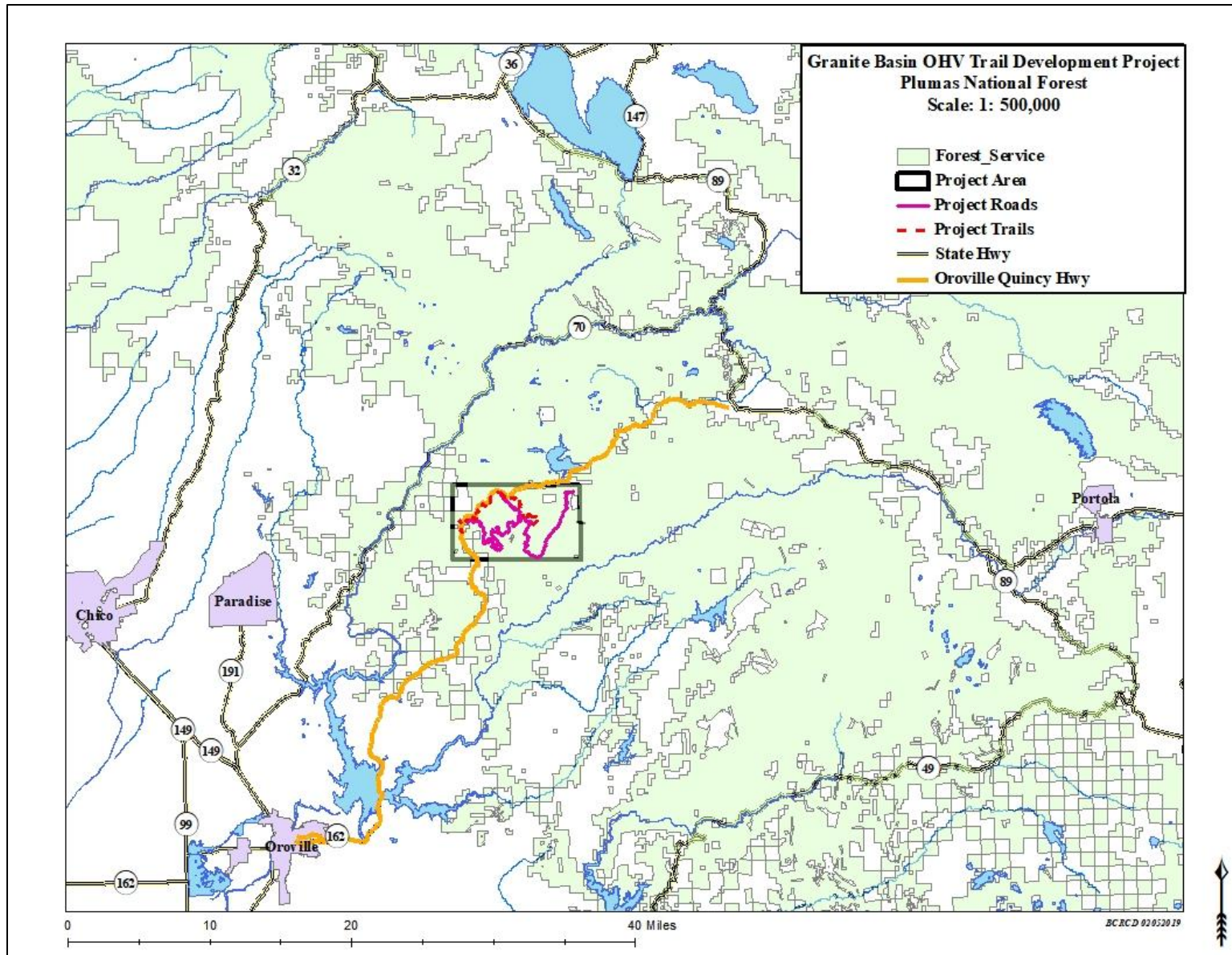


Figure 1: Vicinity map showing project location.



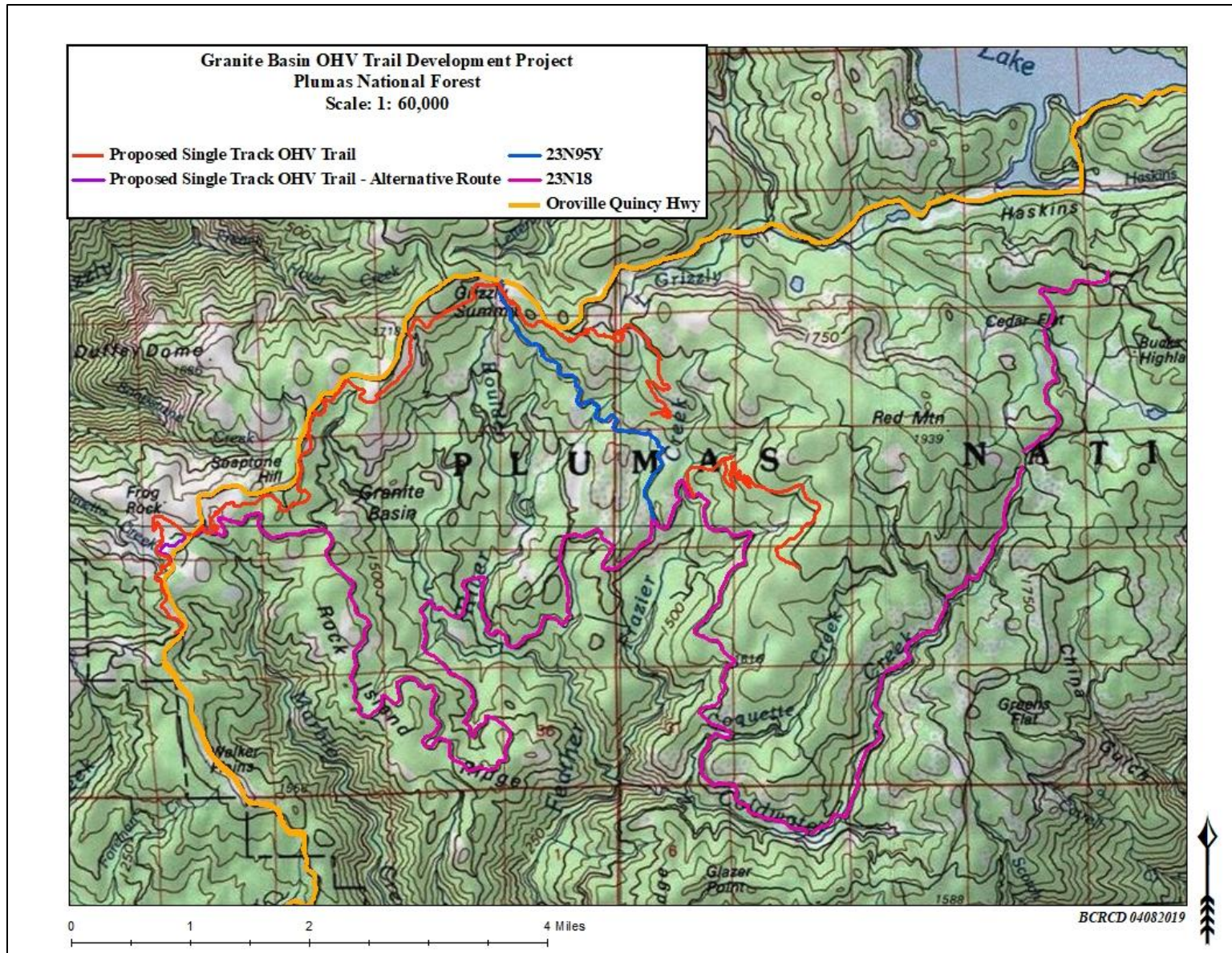


Figure 2: Project Area Map

### Proposed Action

The Forest Service is proposing to meet the need for additional OHV trails in the Granite Basin area. This proposal has two components, each of which has additional alternatives that will be further analyzed during the development of the Environmental Assessment (EA) for this project:

1. **OHV Routes:** Construction and/or reconstruction of approximately 14.8 miles of new, existing non-system, and existing system OHV routes for single lane motorcycle use, and, in certain locations, for all-terrain vehicles (ATV). The trails are designed to match the character of the existing system trails, while keeping trail and construction impacts low and increasing recreational value by providing connectivity and all-day riding options.
  - a. Alternative #1: Original PNF trail design, considered but eliminated from detailed analysis due to resource concerns and economic constraints.
  - b. Alternative #2: 14.8 miles of proposed OHV trail including constructing a new alternative route to avoid utilizing existing non-system route on the historic Swain Railroad Grade.
  - c. Alternative #3: 14.8 miles of proposed OHV trails including utilizing existing non-system route on the historic Swain Railroad Grade
2. **Road Reclassification:** Evaluation of Maintenance Level 3 (ML3) roads for potential to reclassify as Maintenance Level 2 (ML2) or mixed use to increase OHV recreational value by providing connectivity and all-day riding. Three existing alternatives are being evaluated. All three alternatives would reclassify road 23N95Y (3.2 miles) from ML3 to ML2 or mixed use. The difference in the three alternatives involves how much of road 23N18 could safely be changed from ML3 to ML2 or mixed use, based on the results of an engineering analysis and discretion of the Regional Forester.
  - a. Alternative #1: Reclassify all 23.8 miles of 23N18 from ML3 to ML2 or mixed use. Reclassify 23N95Y from ML3 to ML2 or mixed use (3.2 miles).
  - b. Alternative #2: Reclassify 6.9 miles of 23N18 from the end of the chipped sealed road to eastern end of new proposed OHV routes. Reclassify 23N95Y from ML3 to ML2 or mixed use (3.2 miles).
  - c. Alternative #3 Reclassify 5.2 miles of 23N18 that includes the most critical sections needed to provide additional connectivity. Reclassify 23N95Y from ML3 to ML2 or mixed use (3.2 miles).

### Proposed OHV Routes:

As discussed above, three alternatives have been investigated to provide additional OHV routes in the Granite Basin.

#### Alternative #1: PNF original conceptual design

Alternative #1 is the original conceptual trail design in development by PNF before Travel Management (See Figure 3). Preliminary investigation determined that these proposed routes had conflicts with

hydrologic and cultural resources that would be difficult and costly to mitigate and in some cases could result in significant impacts. As a result, this alternative was eliminated from detailed analysis.

**Alternative #2: Proposed OHV Routes including constructing a new alternative route to avoid utilizing existing non-system route on the historic Swain Railroad Grade.**

This action implements elements of the original conceptual trail design developed by PNF (Alternative #1) while maximizing avoidance of potentially sensitive resources (*See* Figure 4 and Figure 5).

The project design consists of 14.8 miles of new, existing non-system, and existing system OHV routes for single lane motorcycle use and, in certain locations, for all terrain vehicle use (ATV). A goal of the project is to match the character of the existing system trails while keeping trail and construction impacts low. The project is primarily designed for use by motorcycles, but includes a location for ATV use. The section for ATV use connects Forest Service Road 23N60X to the existing OHV route 6M34. It would be designated for ATVs that are 50 inches or less in width, but would also allow for motorcycle use.

The project includes the construction of one approximately 25 foot long Multiple Log Stringer Trail Bridge or Prefabricated Bridge to accommodate motorcycle passage over a drainage. The proposed bridge has been incorporated into the project design to avoid sensitive resources. Design authority for the proposed Multiple Log Stringer Bridge falls under the responsibility of the Forest Engineer, who reviews specifications for the 25 feet long bridge and its abutments.

The placement of the project creates OHV legal access with the Plumas National Forest Four Trees OHV Recreation Staging Area, located near the west end of the project at Four Trees. The staging area includes facilities and parking for recreational OHV use. The proposed project crosses the Oroville Quincy Highway in one location without construction changes. One proposed OHV route at the eastern end of the project is not connected to the other new routes, but provides connectivity to other loop opportunities associated with other system trails and roads.

Certain existing routes that are non-system would become system trails and added to the Motor Vehicle Use Map (MVUM). The trails would fall under the specifications and maintenance of Class 2 trails, and be signed accordingly. These trails would be reviewed by the contractor and possible drainage features added to increase trail resiliency and reduce natural resource impacts.

Construction of new trail and the incorporation of non-system trail would be under Forest Service Class 2 specifications for single lane motorcycle trails (8-24 inches wide) and, in sections, for ATV (48-60 inches wide). Trails built by machine would have a maximum 4 feet wide construction corridor to accommodate for the machine passage. Tree removal deemed essential to the construction and function of the trail, or trees that pose a potential hazard to trail users, would be removed by chainsaw. The new proposed routes would be a combination of hand and machine built trail. The construction method would be based on terrain and soil conditions as determined by the contractor. The recommended equipment to be used by the contractor would be a mini-skid steer with a 6-way blade and/or a mini excavator (<4' width). Sections of trail that are dense rock would likely be hand-built. The section of trail north of Forest Service Road 23N85Y would be hand-built.



Resource protection and avoidance measures will be incorporated into the project to the extent possible. The project intends to incorporate resource protection measures including, but not limited to:

- Cultural resource surveys and avoidance of identified resources;
- Botanical resource surveys and avoidance of identified resources;
- Wildlife surveys and avoidance of sensitive habitat and seasons as necessary;
- Wetland and riparian habitat avoided where trail construction and reconstruction would prevent restoration or maintenance of ecological health of watersheds and aquatic systems (Aquatic Conservation Strategy (ACS) objectives);
- Analysis of impacts to hydrologic resources and impact reduction measures implemented in trail location and design;
- Soil erosion best management practices incorporated in project design and maintenance;
- Weed reduction measures will include cleaning of equipment using an appropriate method for the current conditions to reduce introduction and spread of invasive plant species and use of weed-free mulch;
- On-site borrowing of materials for trail tread is encouraged wherever appropriate.

As additional resource needs are identified through project scoping and with the direction of the Forest Service Interdisciplinary Team additional integrated design features will be incorporated into the project to minimize resource impacts.

### **OHV Routes Alternative #3**

Proposed OHV Route Alternative #3 is the same as alternative #2 except that a portion of the historic Swain Railroad grade, which is currently being used and user-maintained as a non-system trail, would become system trail. This would avoid the need to develop the new route identified in alternative #2 (*See* Figure 5). This will require the Forest Service to conduct an evaluation regarding the cultural significance of the Swain Railroad grade and consult with the California State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) to determine whether it is a culturally significant site. If it is determined to be significant, then this alternative will be removed from consideration to avoid impacts to the resource.

### **Road Reclassification:**

As discussed previously, there are three alternatives that are being evaluated with regard to the proposed action to reclassify roads 23N18 and 23N95Y from ML3 to either ML2 or mixed use in order to increase OHV recreational value by providing connectivity and all-day riding. All three alternatives involve reclassifying 23N95Y (3.2 miles) from ML3 to ML2 or mixed use.

**Road Reclassification Alternative #1:** This alternative involves reclassifying the entire 23N18 (23.8 miles) from ML3 to ML2 or mixed use (*See* Figure 4). A portion of this road is paved, and reducing the status to ML2 will limit access to the backcountry to 4 wheel drive vehicles because it will no longer be maintained for passenger vehicles.

**Road Reclassification Alternative #2:** This alternative involves reclassifying 6.9 miles of 23N18 from ML3 to ML2 or mixed use. This differs from Alternative #1 in that two sections of 23N18 are removed from consideration: the western, paved, section of 23N18 from Oroville Quincy Hwy in the west to the

bridge over Toland Creek, and the eastern section of 23N18 from 7M04 to the road's eastern terminus at 23N36. The remaining middle section of road provides critical circulation for OHV trails. Road width and sight distances appear to provide adequate safety for mixed use.

**Road Reclassification Alternative #3:** This alternative involves reclassifying 5.25 miles of 23N18 from ML3 to ML2 or mixed use. The 5.25 miles would not be continuous, but would be split in 2 sections. This differs from Alternative #2 in that 23N18 would remain ML3 between its western and eastern intersections with the 23N59X loop (ML2). The west segment of 23N18 that would be reclassified to ML2 or mixed use is 1.14 miles, and the east segment is 4.11 miles.

### Next Steps

#### Responsible Official

Jerry Bird, Acting Forest Supervisor, Plumas National Forest is the Responsible Official.

#### Anticipated Timeline

We will use your scoping comments to develop issues or alternatives for analysis in an Environmental Assessment. Following review of public comments on the Environmental Assessment, we would draft a decision for the project-level predecisional administrative review process as set out in 36 CFR 218 Subparts A and B.

#### Comments Welcome

We are dedicated to responsible conservation, collaboration and applying the best available science along with local knowledge. Your feedback will influence how we develop and implement projects, so please know your input is important to us. We read every email and letter sent to us.

Comments on this proposed action will be most helpful if received by June 11, 2019. A legal notice of this project scoping period will be published in the Feather River Bulletin, the paper of record of the Plumas National Forest. Computation for the 30 day scoping period is 30 calendar days following the publication date of the legal notice.

In an effort to reduce paper use, the Forest Service will emphasize electronic correspondence throughout this project. Email comments to: [comments-pacificsouthwest-plumas@fs.fed.us](mailto:comments-pacificsouthwest-plumas@fs.fed.us)

You can access additional information on comments and objections by clicking on "Comment/Object on Project" on the right-hand side of the project website at: <https://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=55986>

Comments attachments submitted electronically must be in plain text (.txt), rich text format (.rtf), portable document format (.pdf), or Word (.doc or .docx).

If you have questions or need additional information about this proposal or the comment procedures, please contact Tim Keesey at [tim@bcrd.org](mailto:tim@bcrd.org) or (530) 534-0112 ext 122 or contact Clay Davis at [clay.davis@usda.gov](mailto:clay.davis@usda.gov) or (530) 532-8940.

**Figure 3: Alternative #1: PNF original conceptual design (considered but eliminated from detailed analysis).**  
 “ML# Roads” in the legend refers to the road segments that were going to be evaluated for reclassification.

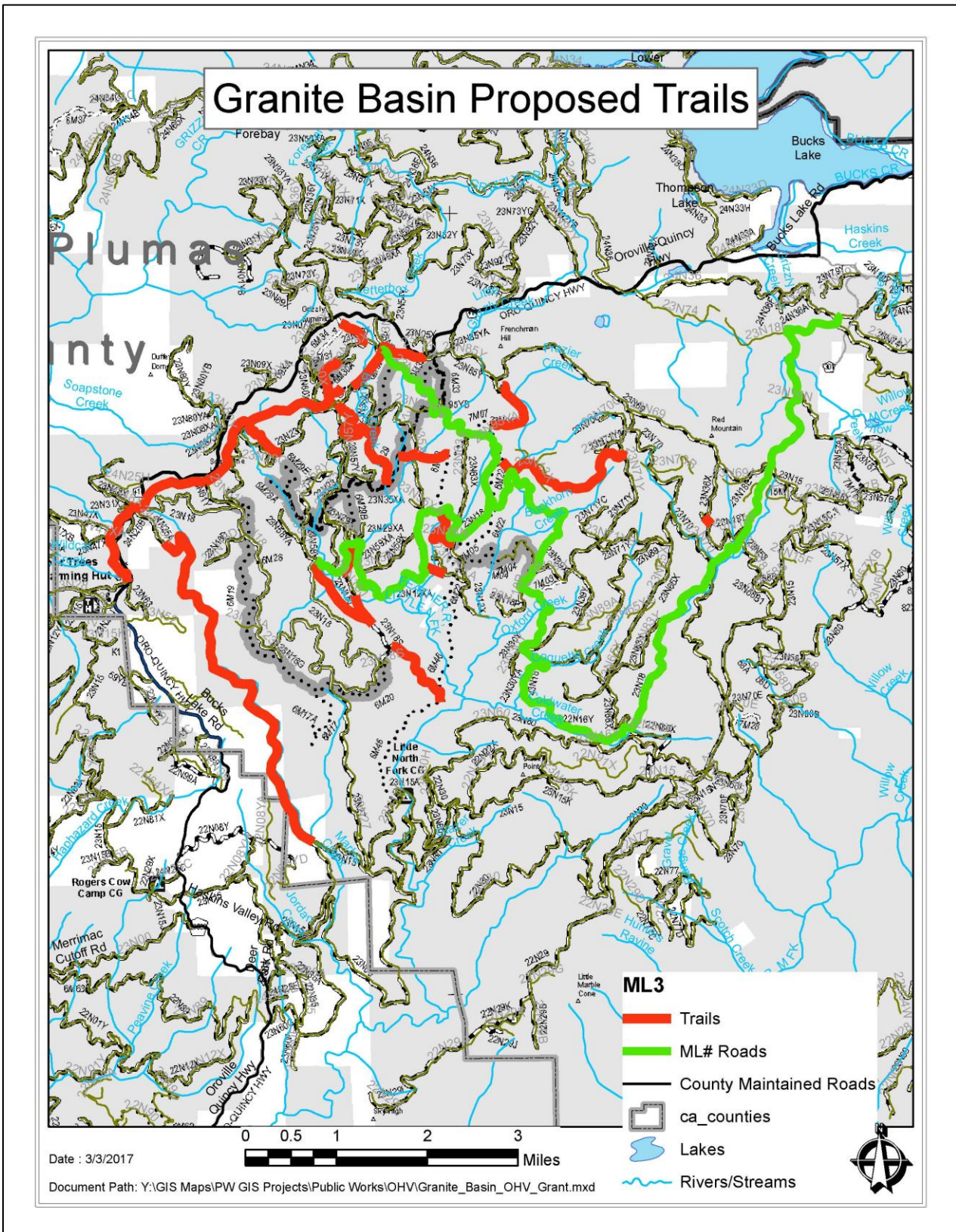




Figure 4: Proposed Single Track OHV Routes with alternatives #2 and #3 and location of Road reclassification alternatives (#1-3).

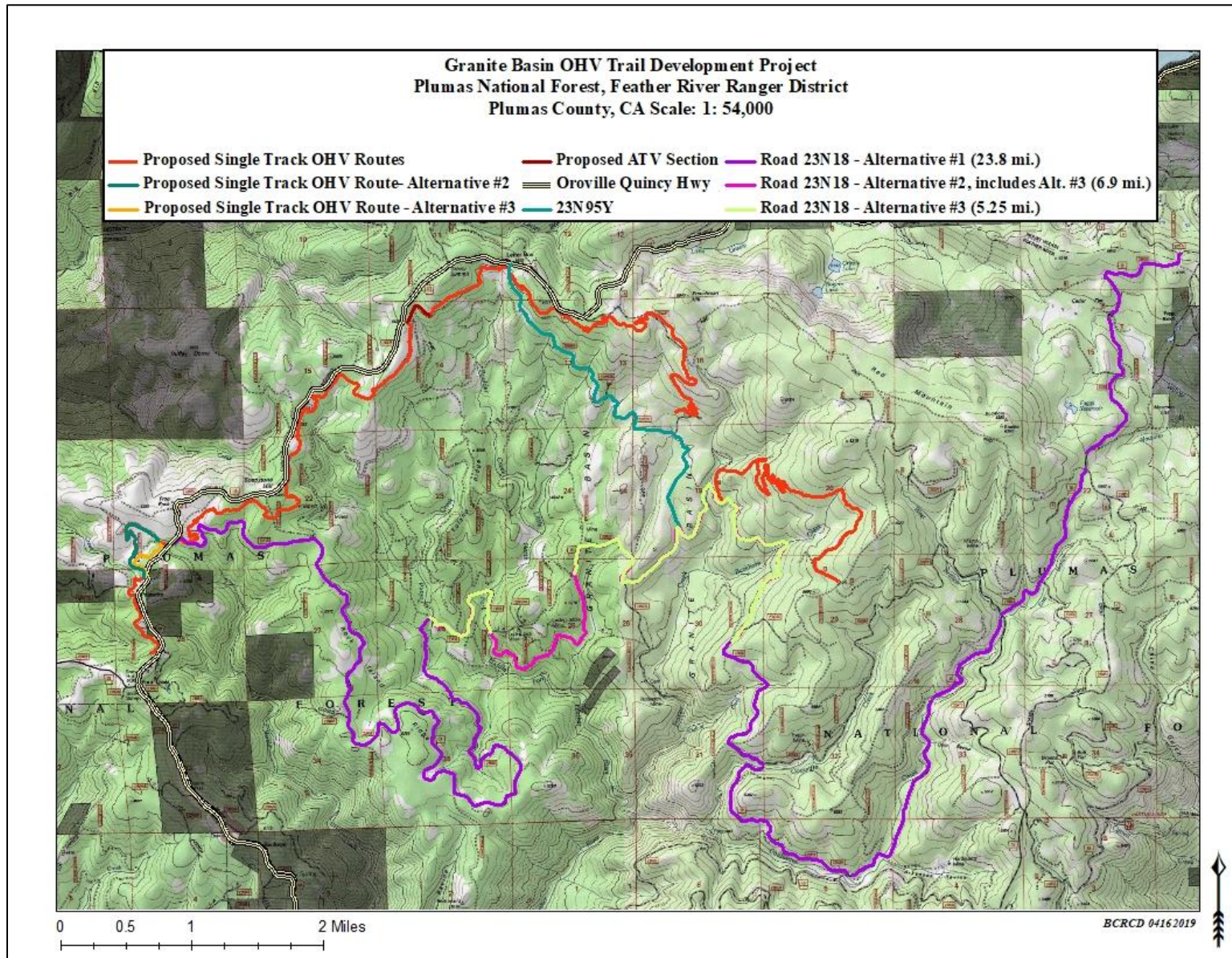
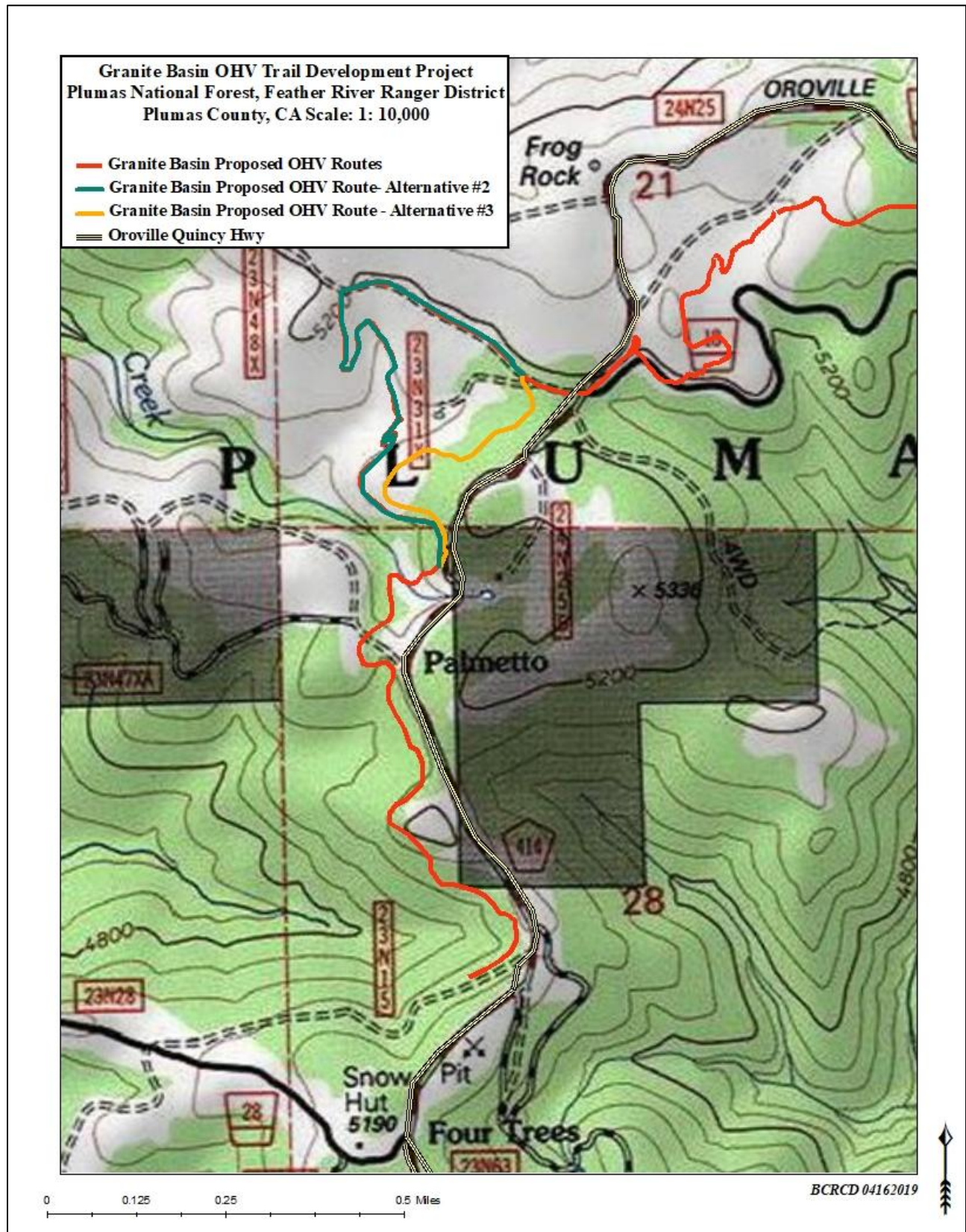




Figure 5: Close up of Proposed OHV Route Alternative 2 and Alternative 3



Maintenance Level 3 (ML3): ML3 is defined in the FSH 7709.58, 10, 12.3. It is assigned to roads open and maintained for travel by prudent drivers in a standard passenger car. User comfort and convenience are low priorities. Roads in this maintenance level are typically low speed, single lane with turnouts, and spot surfacing. Some roads may be fully surfaced with either native or processed material.

These roads have the following attributes:

- Subject to the requirements of Highway Safety Act and MUTCD.
- Roads have low- to moderate-traffic volume.
- Typically connect to arterial and collectors roads.
- A combination of dips and culverts provide drainage.
- May include some dispersed recreation roads.
- Potholing or washboarding may occur.

Maintenance Level 2 (ML2): ML2 roads are defined in the FSH 7709.58, 10, 12.3 and are assigned to roads open for use by high-clearance vehicles. Passenger car traffic is not a consideration. Traffic is normally minor, usually consisting of one or a combination of administrative, permitted, dispersed recreation, or other specialized uses. Log haul may occur at this level.

These roads have the following attributes:

- Roads have low traffic volume and low speed.
- Typically local roads.
- Typically connect collectors or other local roads.
- Dips are the preferred drainage treatment.
- Not subject to the requirements of the Highway Safety Act.
- Surface smoothness is not a consideration.
- Not suitable for passenger cars.

Mixed Use: For the purposes of this document, motorized mixed use is defined as the designation of a Forest Service road for use by both highway legal and non-highway legal motor vehicles. Designating Forest Service roads for mixed use involves safety and engineering considerations. Forest Service guidelines state that reclassification to ML 2 must be considered before mixed use ML3 is considered. Approval of mixed use is granted by the Regional Forester based on adequate analysis provided by a qualified engineer.